

[Harlem]

JUL 6 1939

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

FORM A Circumstances of Interview Da

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Ralph Ellison

ADDRESS 470 W. 150th Street, Manhattan

DATE June 14th, 1939

SUBJECT Harlem

1. Date and time of interview
2. Place of interview Corner of 135th Street and Lenox Avenue
3. Name and address of informant Leo Gurley
4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant.
5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you
6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

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FOLKLORE

NEW YORK

FORM C

TEXT OF INTERVIEW (UNEDITED)

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Ralph Ellison

ADDRESS 470 West 150th Street, Manhattan

DATE June 14th, 1938

SUBJECT Harlem

I hope to God to kill me if this aint the truth. All you got to do is go down to Florence, South Carolina and ask most anybody you meet and they'll tell you its the truth.

Florence is one of these hard towns on colored folks. You have to stay out of the white folks way; all but Sweet. That the fellow I'm fixing to tell you about. His name was Sweet-the-monkey. I done forgot his real name, I caint remember it. But that was what everybody called him. He wasn't no big guy. He was just bad. My mother and grandmother used to say he was wicked. He was bad alright. He was one sucker who didn't give a dam bout the crackers. Fact is, they go got so they stayed out of his way. I caint never remember hear tell of any them crackers bothering that guy. He used to give em trouble all over the place and all they could do about it was to give the rest of us hell.

It was this way: Sweet could make hissself invisible. You don't believe it? Well here's how he done it. Sweet-the-monkey cut open a black cat and took out its heart. Climbed

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up a tree backwards and cursed God. After that he could do anything. The white folks would wake up in 2 the morning and find their stuff gone. He cleaned out the stores. He cleaned up the houses. Hell, he even cleaned out the dam bank! He was the boldest black sonofabitch ever been down that way. And couldn't nobody do nothing to him. Be- cause they couldn't never see im when he done it. He didn't need the money. Fact is, most of the time he broke into places he wouldn't take nothing. Lots a times he just did it to show 'em he could. Hell, he had everybody in that lil old town scaird as hell; black folks and white folks.

The white folks started trying to catch Sweet. Well, they didn't have no luck. Theyd catch 'im standing in front of the eating joints and put the handcuffs on im and take im down to the jail. You know what that sucker would do? The police would come up and say: "Come on Sweet" and he'd say "Youall want me?" and they'd put the handcuffs on im and start leading im away. He'd go with em a little piece;Sho, just like he was going. Then all of a sudden he would turn hissself invisible and dissapear. The police wouldn't have nothing but the handcuffs. They couldn't do a thing with that Sweet-the-monkey. Just before I come up this way they was all trying to trap im. They didn't have much luck. Once they found a place he'd looted with footprints leading away from it and they decided to try and trap im. This was bout sun up and they followed his footprints all that day. They followed them till sundown when he come partly visible. It was red and the sun was shining on the trees and they waited till they saw his shadow. That was the last of the Sweet-the-monkey. They never did find his body and right after that I come up here. That was bout five years ago. My brother was down there last year and they said they think Sweet done come back. But they caint be sho because he wont let hissself be seen.